

Schwartz Bath House (Las Palomas Hotel)
2201-2207 East First Street
Los Angeles
Los Angeles County
California

HABS
CAL
19-LOSAN,
81-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SCHWARTZ BATH HOUSE (Las Palomas Hotel)

HABS
CAL
19-LOSAN,
81-

HABS No. CA-2641

Location: 2201-2207 East First Street (northeast corner of First Street and Chicago Street)
Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California

U.S.G.S. Los Angeles Quadrangle (7.5")
Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) Coordinates:
11.388220.3768580

Significance: The Schwartz Bath House Building is significant for its association with the Jewish community in Boyle Heights; from the mid-1920s to the late-1940s it functioned as a major social center. It is significant as well as an early example of the work of Los Angeles architect Edith Norman, who completed over 200 buildings, primarily multi-unit residential buildings between 1926 and 1938. It is one of the few remaining buildings from the Jewish period in Boyle Heights, and is an example of a rare property type in Los Angeles.

Description: Exterior. This square (100' x 103'6") flat-roofed two-story building, on the corner of Chicago and First Streets in Boyle Heights, is of unreinforced masonry (brick) with a brick veneer on the principal facade (south) facing First Street (see photographs No. 2 and 5.). It is built around a central court that provides light and air to the interior rooms. The main facade is enlivened by simple Classical Revival motifs such as a terra cotta cornice and two projecting entrance bays with arched second floor windows, stepped parapets, and terra cotta rosettes and heraldic shields. Decorative basket weave brick design enlivens the spandrel connecting the tall narrow windows flanking the central arched window (see photograph No. 3.) The terra cotta cornice wraps as well around the west (Chicago Street) elevation. There are three recessed storefronts with checkered tile bulkheads on the First Street elevation; their store windows, now boarded up, were set in frames topped with a soldier course of bricks. Currently the storefront to the east of the entrance has a metal awning and two large vertical metal ducts that extend to the roofline.

The boarded up windows on the two principal facades are narrow rectangles, that originally contained multi-paned casement windows. The north and east elevations are unadorned, with boarded up windows of varying widths and heights set within segmental arches (see photograph No. 1.) The original windows, some of which remain in the central light well, are 1/1 light with double

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hung wood sash. There are five small louvered vents in segmental arched openings on both the east and north elevations above the second floor window level.

Interior. The interior of the building consists of two floors and a basement. It was separated actually and functionally into a west and an east half, divided by load-bearing brick walls. The west half was designed for use as the bath house and the east half as a long-term residential hotel. The difference in use is indicated by such design features as wider corridors in the west half and rooms without bathrooms or closets, indicating that the usage presumably was as resting areas by patrons of the baths (see page 7 for the floor plan). Oral tradition mentions that often the men would spend the night after their baths and massage. Functionally the two halves of the building were kept separate; there was no interior access from one to the other. The present single openings with steel doors, cut through the load bearing brick wall on both the first and second floors to link the north corridors of both halves, came at some later date.

Basement. The steam bath area on the west half of the basement consisted of a large open room with showers, and an enclosed Russian steam room to the north and enclosed steam and sauna rooms and a water tank and equipment room opening off to the east (see page 7 for the floor plan) Eight supporting piers run the length of this open room. The floors are covered with small white hexagonal tiles and the walls and piers have a five foot wainscoting of glazed white tiles. Along the west wall of this room are four marble benches for resting. Tucked into the northwest corner of the room was a bathroom and a wooden massage table in an alcove that could be curtained off. The word "massage" is stencilled onto the wall over the tile (see photograph No. 7). A raised tile swimming pool, reached by four tiled steps, and walled off from the resting room was built in at the southwest corner of the room (see photograph No. 6) A small band of aquamarine tiles runs around three sides on the interior of the pool. The steam room has wall-mounted radiators running along the upper walls of the room (see photograph No. 13) A skylight brings in light from the central well. Heating and ventilating ducts and water pipes run overhead in most of the area.

The storage room on the east side of the basement, lighted by small windows along the east elevation, contained one large boiler in an enclosed room and three smaller boilers within the storage room, at the north end. These boilers have been removed as part of asbestos abatement work.

First floor. There are two main entrances to the building, on the First Street elevation. The entrance on the west leads to a small lobby with stairs going down to the steam rooms and up to the first and second floors. The entrance on the east leads to a small lobby with stairs going down to the storage area and up to the first and second floors. This floor contained mixed use: three retail

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spaces, an office, resting rooms and a locker room (see photograph No 9) were located in the southwest corner of the building, with the remainder of the space devoted to single occupancy hotel rooms of various sizes that open off a double loaded corridor ringing the interior of the building.

The staircases have broad wooden steps with rounded noses and plain rounded wood handrails. The square wooden newel posts make a reference to classical columns, with a base, recessed panels in the plinth and a cornice. The balustrade has simple square posts (see photograph No. 8 and 12).

The interior walls are lathe and plaster. The floors are wood. Each room has at least one double hung window and a door with simple wood surrounds, a wooden baseboard, and a single overhead porcelain light socket. Some of the rooms have small built-in closets (see photographs No. 10 & 11). There are a number of small toilet rooms.

Second floor. Four staircases lead from the first floor to the second floor, that contains single room occupancy bedrooms and toilet rooms that are similar to the first floor rooms. Four skylights provide light to the corridors (see page 8 for the floor plan).

Alterations. Based on building permit research and on-site inspection, the building appears to be almost intact, with the exception of the storefronts that have been remodelled over the years. Some of the interior rooms appear to have been divided into smaller rooms. The white paint on the exterior of the main elevation is a recent addition as part of graffiti control.

Surroundings. The building, on the corner of First and Chicago Streets, is surrounded on the north and the east by vacant lots used for parking, set off behind chain link fences. To the south across First Street is a grassy triangular area with several trees. The surrounding buildings are largely one and two story commercial, religious, and residential buildings constructed between 1910 and the present, with little cohesion in terms of size and scale.

Historical Context: The Schwartz Bath House was built in 1925 in Boyle Heights, at the cost of \$80,000, as the second bath house built in Los Angeles. It was designed by the architects West and Northman and built by the contracting firm of Boyleston Construction Company for Aron Schwartz, who lived in the neighborhood at 2226 Michigan.

The Boyle Heights area by the 1920s held a large Jewish population, which had emigrated across the Los Angeles River from the West Adams area to settle in Boyle Heights and City Terrace. The area contained many synagogues, kosher delicatessens, schools, and community centers. The Schwartz Bath House, in the

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center of Boyle Heights, was close to a park, a library, a fire station, police station, Breed Street Shul, and a community meeting hall.

One of the designers of the Bath House is believed to be architect Edith Mortensen Northman (1893-1956), a Danish architect who worked in Los Angeles from 1921 to 1938. At the time this building was constructed she was working for architect Clarence J. Smale; she did not yet have her license, a fact that might explain why she went in with a partner West. She opened her own architectural firm in 1926, studied architecture at USC, received her license in 1931, and designed approximately 120 buildings between 1926-1938, that included multi-unit residential buildings in Leimert Park, Miracle Mile, South Carthay, and Hollywood, commercial buildings such as Union Oil Company gas stations, religious buildings such as the Sephardic Orthodox Congregation Ohel Avraham synagogue, and the Emanuel Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church near Leimert Park, and single family houses in Hancock Park, Los Feliz and Beverly Hills.

The Bath House is a cultural property type that developed as a result of the Jewish belief in a clean body for the Sabbath. Because Jews in the Old World often could not afford their own baths and were forbidden to bathe in rivers, they created the "shvitzbad" or "sweatbath", where the men could take communal baths for the Sabbath. The residents of Boyle Heights brought this tradition with them when they emigrated from eastern Europe. The first shvitzbad in Los Angeles was the "Russian Bath House" at 328 S. Pecan Street, slightly west of the Schwartz Bath House, and the latter became the second. It became the social center for the Jewish community in Boyle Heights between the mid-1920s and the late 1940s, at which time the Jewish population began moving away from the area.

The Bath House was open day and night to men, with one night a week available for women. For a fee, clients were able to use steam baths, a small swimming pool, showers, treatment with eucalyptus branches (a Turkish custom, unlike the Russian bath house), and massages. After the treatment they went upstairs, wrapped in white sheets, to rest, to play poker and pinochle, eat, drink, and converse. According to oral tradition men brought whiskey, rye bread, and pickled herring, or bought pickles and salami or chopped liver sandwiches at the Bath House. Rooms were available for rent if men wished to spend the night. Apparently the women had the same traditions when they came once a week for Ladies' Night.

The Schwartz Bath House, with its restaurant, hotel, and shops, continued in use until the 1970s, although many of the Jewish clientele had moved away by the late 1940s to the Fairfax area, West Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley. It became a single room occupancy hotel in the 1970s and 1980s. Damaged in the Whittier Narrows earthquake of 1987, it was closed and has been vacant ever

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since. In 1993 A Community of Friends bought the property for rehabilitation into affordable housing for chronically mentally ill persons.

Sources: Historic Resources Group. August 1993. *Determination of Eligibility Report. Bath House Building. 2201-2207 East First Street, Los Angeles.* Submitted by Los Angeles Community Development Department to the State Office of Historic Preservation.

Maria Cabildo, Project Manager, A Community of Friends, personal communication July 25, 1995

Project Information: This HABS documentation is being prepared to comply with the Memorandum of Agreement among the City of Los Angeles, the California State Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The Schwartz Bath House is being rehabilitated by A Community of Friends, a non-profit developer, for affordable housing for the chronically mentally ill, and is slated for completion at the end of 1995.

Projected changes include redesigning the interior to provide rooms with private baths. The double loaded corridor configuration will remain but the new corridors will be narrower to accommodate the additional bathrooms. The stairs at the west entrance will be retained. However the lobby is being lowered to comply with disabled access requirements. The basement will retain the glazed tile, marble benches, and swimming pool configuration, while being rehabilitated into offices for case management and recreation areas. The steam room will have its roof removed to open it to the light well and will become a planted area. Openings will be cut in the basement brick wall to connect the east and west halves.

The seismic rehabilitation on the First and Chicago Street elevations will include the use of non-through bolts (Hilti) so that the seismic plates will not be visible.

The 4' x 5' archival photographs were taken by Richard J. Levy, AIA, APA of Architectural Photography and Design in Los Angeles in 1994 and 1995. The written documentation was prepared by Alexandra C. Cole of Preservation Planning Associates in Santa Barbara, in July 1995, based on a report by Historic Resources Group, Los Angeles written in 1993.

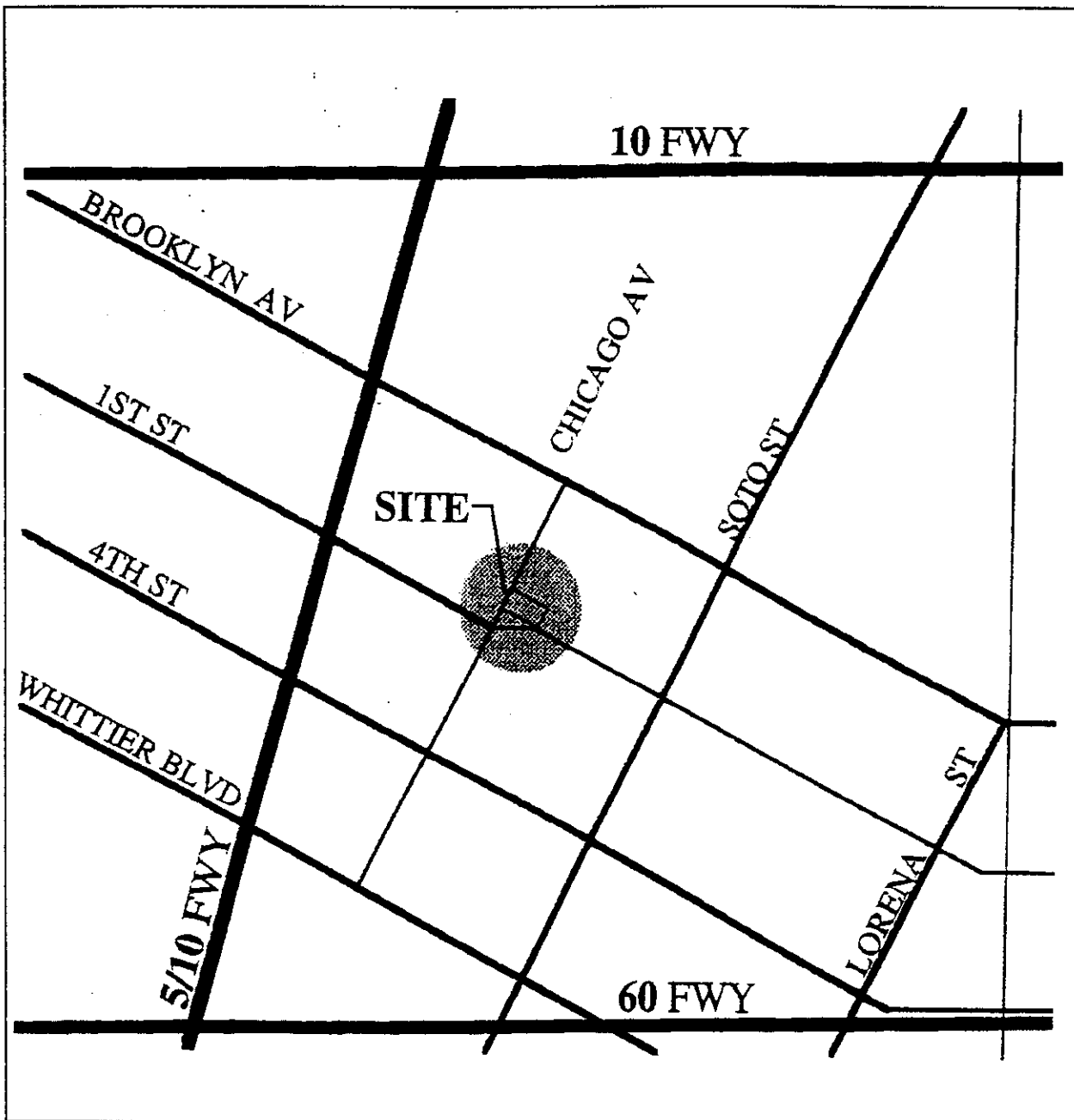


Figure 1
VICINITY MAP LAS PALOMAS HOTEL
2201-2207 East First Street, Los Angeles, California
Courtesy Hatch Colasuonno Studio, Marina Del Ray